

Dumb Luck by Pondermoniums

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Summary:

Anyone has the dumb luck to get bitten by a spider. But not like Steve. Steve, who has been riding his luck at getting into college in the same city as his best friend. The luck that has him embracing his bisexuality and running into Billy Hargrove, of all people.

But Steve isn't lucky. His luck ran out.

It seems Billy's has too.

1. Threads

Author's Note:

Okay, I took some liberties and I never saw the 2018 Venom, so please don't attack me.

Steve couldn't believe his luck. The one branch of classes he hadn't taken in high school turned out to be the one subject he was not only decent at, but *good. Great.* Sure, he'd always been tolerable with numbers growing up, but after too many middle school teachers told him to *stop asking disruptive questions*, Steve stopped asking.

Now here he sat, in an NYU *Mathematical Theory and Philosophy* course.

It was all dumb luck, if you were to ask Steve. Asking dumb questions in class, carrying a dumb GPA, and then oversleeping for his community college advisor meeting so he had to let the woman throw his schedule together with whatever was left. Then he asked his dumb questions and...got a very different response.

"What even are numbers? I don't get negative numbers. How can you count a lack of something? It's like money. It doesn't actually exist. If it's all imaginary, then why are we counting a lack of something? If you hit zero then it's zero. How many lollipops do you have? It's none! You can't have negative three lollipops."

Okay, so his rant might have been the result of years' worth of fermenting aggression at the academic system. With a silent class around him and a deer-in-the-headlights instructor, Steve had slumped in his seat and mumbled an apologetic, "No one's been able to explain this stuff to me. I'm too dumb for it."

Then his teacher had replied, "Mr. Harrington, you just touched on several high level mathematical discussions. The debate over the existence of zero, imaginary numbers, the similarities between numbers and linguistics, and the economic machine. You have nothing to apologize for."

And holy shit, one semester with someone with the actual patience to explain things to him, someone hearing his last name, and here he sat, in a circle of desks while everyone discussed zero. Freaking *zero*. And the philosophy teacher next door was cool as shit, always bringing in his wife's baked successes or disasters; making jokes about how, "You need to go to that drunk place in your brain. You know, that loveseat in the back of your brain where you crash when you're drunk or high, and everything tastes good while you're sitting in the loveseat? Sit there, and this brioche isn't nearly as bad."

Fuck, Steve actually liked college.

It was all dumb luck, but he rode it all the way through the city on the subway. He rode it to the big, fancy, science skyscraper everyone in his major was invited to. He looked at the stuff that look a hell of a lot more like biology than anything he was studying, but it was also just like him to run smack into a door because he lagged behind his class.

Someone snorted behind him. "Let me get that for you, Harrington."

It's an out of body experience, seeing memories in a new landscape. So he stared at Billy Hargrove a bit too long, inciting the guy to pull on the collar of his polo, as if straightening it for him. "I didn't think you wore contacts. The glasses look good on you, pretty boy."

"Billy?" Steve blurted. He lifted his brows in affirmation as he leaned past him to scan a keycard. "You work here?"

"Intern," he confirmed. "How do I look in a lab coat?"

Steve vacantly looked down, eyes trailing all over him before Billy's chuckle made him realize he wasn't actually supposed to check him out. His head jerked up. "I never took you as the science type."

"That's because you never saw me in the chemistry hallway."

Steve had to walk through the door he was holding and be quiet since his classmates were on the other side, looking over the balcony edge of a massive, circular room. Steve joined the back of his student group and gazed at the scientists going about their business, but only

as long as it took him to notice how the lower floor, as well as their observatory gallery, branched off into open hallways. All the glass and steel made it easy to see that they were in a library of...stuff.

Billy's lab coat brushed against Steve's jacket, making him realize Billy had followed him in. And was leaning close to murmur without disrupting their guide, "Biochemistry. Genetics, cross-engineering, all that stuff you'd think would be more exciting than computers and paperwork."

Steve glanced at him. He must've had to cut his hair for the internship, but he kept those curls that framed his stark blue eyes. "Not having fun?"

"Clipboards are exhilarating," he exhaled huskily as they both pivoted to keep up with the group strolling around the gallery. Steve blinked, trying to listen to the guide but was too busy suppressing the tingles making him want to shiver.

It had been a long time since he'd seen Billy Hargrove. He was pretty sure the last real conversation they had involved punches being thrown, but he didn't actually have any beef with the guy. Between Billy's behavior and his stepsister's, Max, Steve knew something at home wasn't right, but in Hawkins, Indiana, you minded your own business.

Now, as he strolled behind Steve, Billy seemed...relaxed in a way he never had been back in high school. The summer before everyone moved away and left Steve to his community college fate, he'd gotten wind of "the lifeguard" at the community pool. Kids loathed him. Adults adored him. Which meant he was good at his job—*job* being ruining kids' fun with strict safety enforcement. Steve never saw him at work, though, since he had his own pool. All he really knew about Billy was the guy played mean on the basketball court, sure as hell didn't like being second place in anything, and both made his sister's life a living hell while also being weirdly protective over her.

But Steve was just the impromptu babysitter during wild, Hawkins nights. And after his and Billy's bruises had faded, they'd never spoken to one another.

Until now, with Billy tugging lightly on Steve's jacket to draw him into one of the hallways branching off from the main work area. The other students did the same; the short, see-through hallways more like alcoves for aquariums and other animal or plant tanks. They spread out, prompted by their guide to take it all in.

Billy had drawn him into a bug area. Steve scoffed at him, "Spiders? Why are we looking at bugs?"

"They're not classified as bugs, but never mind. Look."

He flicked a switch on the wall, and the bright, grow lights for the plants switched with black lighting. Under the indigo and violet glow, the arachnids and their webs sparked with colors. Any webbing previously invisible, now glowed in the alternate lighting. And there was a *lot* of webbing.

Billy narrated, "I like seeing their little nests."

Steve chuckled as he bent over to see more closely. "They're having little disco raves in there."

Billy laughed, and it was not a sound Steve would ever have expected back home. Light and warm.

Billy began to respond, but Steve's gaze lowered to the glowing cobweb stuck between his jacket and the displays. "Uh. Is this a problem?"

Billy followed his gaze and caught the web on his finger to tear off his clothing. "The threads get stuck on things when we open the containers, that's all." He held the cobweb up. "See how it's scraggly? It's an old, abandoned web."

They both perked up at the students filing into their area, having been drawn by the light show.

That tug on his jacket again.

"Come here," Billy said, and Steve followed through the crowd of students.

They went to another hallway, but this one had sliding glass doors barring the way. Billy scanned in and Steve remarked, "Is this allowed?"

Billy gave him a look. "Everyone knew that someone in the *Scoops Ahoy* was letting underage kids into the movie theater. When did you start abiding by rules?"

Steve blinked at him and couldn't help but say, "I never saw you at the mall."

"I dropped my sister off all the time. She always left her ticket stubs in my car."

Steve cooed a soft, "Oh," and looked around the room—

"Jesus!" he cried when something launched itself at the glass of its aquarium when Billy walked by it. Billy's hand overlapped Steve's on his lab coat. Steve hadn't realized he'd grabbed him, but Billy let him yank him back away from the tank.

"It's okay," he chuckled. "I'm pretty sure a bazooka couldn't break that glass."

Steve could only let Billy unwrap his hand while he stared at the small, black mass doing its damndest to get the hell out of its container. Water sloshed around during its efforts. "Billy, that thing's *aggressive*."

"Yeah, the shit bird won't die," he laughed and glanced around the room. "I don't know where they found this little guy, but it's been the most successful thing to come out of here."

Steve likewise peered around, but as far as he could tell, the other habitats were empty.

Billy continued as he peered inside the water of the tank. "I guess they're trying to see what water does to it. It's fire resistant."

Steve frowned at the odd glob of...what looked like black sludge in the water. "So you're drowning it?"

Billy shook his head. "They haven't killed it yet. It's clearly just fine without oxygen. It looks like it's learning how to swim."

Steve outright grabbed his wrist this time and tugged Billy out of the room. "I've seen *Jurassic Park* enough times to know this is bad news."

The glass doors shut behind them and Billy laughed, "We don't have any fossils to extract DNA...as far as I know...Uh oh."

The last part was added quietly, but Steve looked in the direction of a stern scientist gesturing for Billy to come over. Billy rotated to murmur, "Time for a lecture."

"Don't play with dino DNA," Steve agreed as Billy began to step away.

Billy snorted quietly. "Nobody's actually allowed in that room. I don't know why they gave my card access to it, then."

"Tight ship, here," Steve remarked, earning a congenial smirk from Billy.

"See you around, pretty boy," and then on his way out of the gallery said to nobody in particular, "*Dino DNA*," in the accent from the man in the movie.

Steve smiled to himself as he rejoined his group, and kept smiling as he followed mindlessly out of the biochemistry lab. He caught himself the same time one of his classmates nudged him. "He's cute," she chimed encouragingly.

"Huh?" he blurted and then shook his head at her. "No, no. We just knew each other from our small town. Small world."

"He's still cute," she insisted.

Steve scratched his neck, feeling the tickle of his hair on his nape. After a long moment, Steve realized he was holding his breath. He let it out in shallow breaths, and then longer ones as he forced himself to be calm.

Billy is cute.

Admitting that sent jolts of panic, exhilaration, and cautious glee through him. Steve knew he was bisexual, and had known for years even if he suppressed it to the point of truly believing he was a straight boy from small town, Indiana. Until he worked with Robin. Robin, who worked in the drama department of her school in Queens. Robin the lifesaver, because she trusted him enough to come out to him, and then caught him when he needed to move to the city and have his own drug-addled coming out conversation. Steve wondered what she'd think when he returned to their shared apartment and told her about Billy.

Was he even allowed to like Billy? They hadn't been friends before. And just because he met Steve with friendliness now, didn't necessarily mean Billy was bisexual too.

When did you start abiding by rules?

Steve adjusted his glasses and rubbed his nose. He couldn't help but laugh a little at himself. Crushing over Billy Hargrove, of all people, after ten minutes of—

“AGH!” he choked as the sharpest jolt of pain shot down his spine. Heads turned to look at him as he scratched his nape violently, but as soon as it had come, it was gone. “Sorry! Sorry.”

“Are you okay?” the girl asked when attention returned to their guide.

“Yeah. I think—you know when your hair gets stuck in the threads of your clothes, and your clothes rip it out? I think that just happened.”

“Oh. That's the worst,” she commiserated.

Steve laughed, righted his shirt underneath his jacket—

And passed out on the subway back to Queens.

2. Venom

He didn't remember passing out. He remembered the turnstiles going into the station, and then a strange, floating sensation. Then he woke up to see the annoyed and worried expressions of the bodega employee and a generous nurse who had been on the subway with him. The bodega manager offered him a ginger ale while the nurse explained what had happened. How he'd turned whiter than a ghost in the subway, and she'd guided some people who were strong enough to carry him out at the nearest stop to the bodega.

And then he interrupted by vomiting between the Doritos and the seltzers.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry," he tried to apologize. He didn't know what was wrong with him. He'd been completely fine this morning, and said as much.

"It could be a stomach bug," she said. "There's always one going around. We won't know unless we get you to a clinic or hospital."

Steve really didn't want to throw up in a taxi. He fumbled in his clothes for his phone, and called Robin before handing the phone to the nurse. He sipped on the ginger ale while they waited for his roommate to come get him. He paid for the drink, if nothing else than to make up for vomiting in the tiny convenience store, and then leaned on Robin as they walked through the city.

"When did you last eat?" she asked while looking around to get her bearings.

"This morning. I just want to go home."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure, Robin. Walking is helping."

So they walked until he felt able to risk the subway again. The motion of the trains was better than the winding, stop-and-go traffic above. Robin's hand on his, or rubbing his back while they waited in

between stops helped a lot. When they entered their apartment, she made him eat what he could of some canned soup before he fell asleep out on the couch.

* * *

He couldn't say how he knew. But he *knew* it was somewhere before 1a.m., and a hand was reaching for him.

Robin's yelp might as well have been his own, as he startled awake, jumping...off...the couch....

Steve and Robin stared at each other. Except Steve was upside down. And on the *ceiling*. They had the same posture, both of them having leapt back and crab-walked away from each other, except Steve had gone much farther than Robin.

Robin, who now stood up with her hands up like understanding, or defense. "Steve. What the actual fuck."

Steve didn't know what was happening. He looked down—or up?—at his hands splayed on the textured ceiling plaster. He tried to take his hand off, but his fingertips were *stuck*—

"Oh," he blurted when he managed to free his hand, but at the expense of ripping plaster off the ceiling. His surprise relaxed his body, and then—

"Oh shit!"

But no sooner did gravity make his intestines swing, than he landed on all fours behind the couch. Like some kind of cat.

"Steve," Robin repeated. "What the actual fuck?"

His head peeked over the back of the couch. He realized he was soaking with sweat and let his head rest on the couch as he whined, "*I don't know.*"

Robin had meant to wake him up for a shower, or to tell him to go to bed, or maybe to haul his ass to the hospital. But as he picked off the parts of the ceiling that were stuck to his fingers, she went through

his backpack, his jacket. “Steve...”

With kitchen tongs, she lifted the crushed body of a spider. The thing was *big*. Well, small, but big enough that he should have—anybody should have—been aware of it.

“How the hell didn’t I feel that thing crawling around me?”

She ignored that to instruct, “Turn around. Take off your shirt.”

He did, flinching against the air on his damp skin before wincing when she touched his nape. “It bit you.”

“Oh.”

“*Oh?* Steve, oh?”

“It bit me in the lab—place. The field trip I told you about. But it was so fast, I didn’t think it was something *biting* me.”

Robin dropped the little body into a mason jar and sealed it tight. “Did you see anything else like this while you were there?”

Steve took the time to wash his mouth out over the sink, scrubbing his face and lathering some soap on his nape. The area wasn’t swollen, but it sure felt like the skin had been peeled back. Raw and bruised. Pressing too hard made his *toes* hurt.

“Yeah. They showed us this observatory place. It was full of living stuff. Plants, fish, bugs. The spiders weren’t even sanctioned off, though.”

“Well one was clearly on the loose, and it decided to take a ride on your neck. Get in the shower. Don’t die in there while I research spider bites. You might really need a hospital.”

She took a picture of his neck and sent him off. Only when he was naked under the water did he realize: Would Billy get in trouble for this?

No. No, the spiders weren’t in a locked room. The entire student group walked in there. Maybe Steve wasn’t the only one dealing with

something like this right now. Which...would be a hell of a lawsuit for the company, but maybe Billy would be a good person to ask about this instead of a doctor. A regular M.d. wouldn't know anything about a scientifically modified bug, right?

All of a sudden, Steve turned the water off. He hadn't even meant to do that, but the ominous creak and groan of his strength on the faucet made him whip his hand back. And take the handle with him.

He heaved a tired breath, "Christ, what is happening to me?"

But he couldn't even focus on that because he felt the weight of every single goddamn water droplet on his skin. He shoved the shower curtain aside and reached for the towels—tearing the towel rack out of the wall.

Robin's attention lifted from her laptop screen to peer at the bathroom door and the amount of cursing coming from it. "Steve?"

"I'm fine!" came his muffled voice.

"You're not fine. Your bite doesn't look like anything in this database."

Then directly above her, she heard, "Robin, something is seriously wrong here—OW! HEY!"

Steve was on the ceiling again. Robin smacked him with her notebook once on accident, and twice on purpose. "STEVE, if you crawl around like a bug, I'll beat the shit out of you like a bug! Get down!"

His body turned over like a gymnast, his fingertips latched onto the ceiling before he let go with jarring grace before he practically vibrated next to her.

"I'm losing my mind! I can—I can—I can feel everything! Like I can fucking hear your shirt against your skin. The static in your hair. Robin, I'm losing my mind!"

She tried to absorb this as fast as he was saying it. Her eyes wandered his wet hair and bare torso. "At least you put underwear on."

Steve's eyes were wider than full moons as he glared at her. "I'm going to throw up if I put clothes on."

Her own eyes narrowed on him. "You seem...oddly...fine."

"Fine? You think *this is fine*?" He grabbed her phone, wrenched it out of its case with just the pad of a finger sticking to it, and then clenched the case in his fist. He flinched and whined, "Ow," at the plastic shards stabbing his hand.

Robin took both from him and held his bleeding hand as she declared, "Okay. Okay, you've made your point. Good grief, you're a mess. Hang on."

She went to go get band-aids out of their shared bathroom. Then she saw the state he had left it. "Jesus Christ, Steve!"

"I told you!"

"You ripped the shower handle off the wall!"

"I almost pulled the whole pipe out of the wall," he grumbled, reaching for the tissue box on their coffee table. He sat cross-legged with it on his lap and held a tissue against his palm. Then he sat up with an unhappy glance behind him. "We need a new couch."

"We're not getting a new couch," she retorted, returning with the box of band-aids and some antiseptic gel.

"The fabric is shitty."

"It's always been shitty. You didn't need your new bug powers to know that. Give me your hand."

He suppressed his need to flinch when she grasped his hand. He could ruin the chances of getting their deposit back, but he couldn't live with himself if he accidentally broke her arm. "Could you just, like...squeeze wherever you touch? Otherwise it's the worst tickling feeling."

"Yeah, sure," she exhaled tiredly. Steve shared the sentiment, even though adrenaline and panic coursed through his system.

“Why does shit like this always happen in the middle of the night, huh?”

Her lashes lifted to poise a look at him while she administered antiseptic gel. “I don’t think anything like this has happened. Nighttime or otherwise.”

He hummed a sound of acknowledgement, and for a while, only the low sounds of the city around them filled the silence. Steve dared to ask, “What are the chances we’ll wake up tomorrow and just had the same nightmare?”

She gave that some thought and teased, “Want to bet money on it?”

He chuffed at that. “No. Kinda thought I was having a good day, too. Before...all of this.”

“Tell me about it,” she prompted while looking through the assorted sizes of band-aids. She decided to go back to the bathroom for cotton pads and gauze. As she began to wrap his hand, she explained, “I figure this is better than the sticky band-aid.”

“Yeah,” he sighed. “I ran into Billy Hargrove today.”

She looked at him with fresh eyes. “*Billy Hargrove?* Wow.”

“Right,” he managed to laugh through his unsteady breaths. “He... looked good.”

Her brows pinched together over a hard yet curious stare. “Isn’t he the one who beat the shit out of you that one time?”

“Yeah. A weird, messy misunderstanding.”

“It’s one hell of a way to get your face rearranged.”

“Ha ha,” he sassed. “It was both of our faults. And Max filled me in on some stuff. The two of us in the same room was just a powder keg waiting to blow. But he seemed different. Much more relaxed, like the city has been good to him.”

“You can say he’s smoking hot,” she teased. “I remember how

straight girls talked about him back in Hawkins.”

“We spoke to each other for maybe ten minutes,” he retorted.

“What did you spoke about?” she teased while holding the gauze wrap in place to situate the metal clamp.

Steve had to think about that. He replayed the disjointed events of the day and admitted, “Not...really anything. He just kind of joined our tour group for a little bit and showed me his favorite stuff.”

Robin screwed the lid back on the gel tube until she had to ask, “Is that some sort of guy thing?”

He turned his hand over, examining her work and wondering how likely he would be to tear it off before he lost his mind. He glanced at her, realizing she waited for an answer. “What? No? What do you mean, a guy thing?”

“You’re telling me,” she wiggled her butt back so she could sit crisscross, “that with no prompting whatsoever, he just joined up with you and basically showed you his favorite ant hills?”

“More like a library of glow in the dark spiders, but yeah.”

“He likes you.”

“What? No.”

“Uh, yes.”

“Robin, if anything, he was just flexing the stuff he gets to work on. He even said it was boring. Like, wow, how special, you get to work in a super science lab and find it boring because you’re so smart.”

She laughed and insisted, “Steve, this isn’t high school. Big boys in the big apple play different games. More straight forward ones. Even if there isn’t anything so straight about them.”

That sufficiently distracted Steve from all of his nerves being on fire. “Billy’s not straight?”

Robin shrugged. "I don't know. He always stood out, though. You can kind of tell when people stand out a certain way. It doesn't need to be a stereotype. Some people are just quietly...different."

"I never would've described Hargrove as quiet." Steve hopped right onto his feet, strong enough to just pop up without even being tired from his own weight. He moved from foot to foot, both because he needed to move or else he might explode, and because...he kind of felt powerful. Not like light was about to shoot out of his fingers, but he felt...bouncy.

"How do you think Billy would react to seeing you dancing in your briefs?"

Steve jerked wide eyes over his shoulder, making Robin cackle and call him a goblin.

"Listen, bug boy, I need to sleep. Please wake me up if you feel sick again. Either tomorrow or later this week, we need to talk to your hottie anyway."

Steve stood like a lost beanstalk as she meandered toward her room. "Billy?"

"Yes, Billy. If he works in that spider lab, then he's got to have some kind of medical, emergency training, right? You need to have that bite looked at. And try not to break anything else. Please."

* * *

Steve broke the coffee maker.

He swore up and down that it was on its last legs anyway, but it meant that he and Robin had to make a pit stop on their way to Billy's work. Both of them were missing class to do this. Steve's complexion had not improved, and Robin confirmed that his bite was still raw and angry. Steve hadn't dared use a mirror to try and look at it. That would be the last straw to all of this somehow being real.

But as they waited at the front desk for the person to find and call down Billy, Robin and Steve exchanged looks. She discretely leaned toward him and murmured, "This is shady. How hard is it to find

your interns?”

“Billy showed me a room yesterday that was off limits. He even said his keycard shouldn’t have access to it.”

Her eyes widened. “The hell is that? What kind of program is he in that they leave poisonous spiders out and let kids into top secret rooms?”

“We’re not kids, Robin.”

“Right. We can vote for scumbags and die for them but I’m stealing cheap wine from the quickie-mart.”

“Really? I have five people off the top of my head who could just buy it for you.”

She moved her hands energetically between them. “You’re missing the point! Remember chem. lab in high school? We had to have a whole class devoted to laboratory rules and regulations just to light a Bunsen burner. It sounds like you guys shouldn’t have even been allowed in that lab in the first place based on how they’re running it —”

“Excuse me.” They both turned to the woman behind the desk. “I’m sorry, but Mr. Hargrove hasn’t shown up yet. I can give him a message when he arrives, if you want.”

Steve and Robin glanced at each other. Steve replied, “Uh. Yeah, that’d be great. Do you have something I can write on?”

He wrote his name and cell number on the note pad. He watched the woman fold the paper and write Billy’s name and keycard number on it before setting it aside.

With nothing else to do, Steve and Robin left the building.

* * *

They tried again the following afternoon after class. They were told Billy had shown up, but left early due to feeling ill.

Steve had asked Robin on their way back out onto the street, “How likely are they to just give me Billy’s address?”

She peered at him, looking him over. “Based on how you’re still sweating? They might think Billy’s your dealer or something.”

Steve huffed indignantly before her words settled a bit deeper and he had to laugh. Given how things were going, he felt fine despite still looking fresh out of a sauna. All of Steve’s teachers had asked about his health at this point. It was only a matter of time before they either kicked him out of class to see a doctor, or because he kept disrupting class fidgeting with his clothes.

Like a breath moving across his neck, Steve felt the hairs on his nape stand up. He whirled around, hands raised and ready to smack whoever got so close...

Nobody was behind him.

Which was really saying something considering it was Long Island.

“What’s wrong?” Robin asked, peering around the spacious pavement.

“I thought...” But his hands slowly fell back to his sides. Maybe because he’d kept so much *Billy* on the brain over the last couple of days, he truly thought he’d...heard or—fuck—*smelled* the guy behind him or something. And the disappointment that he was wrong...hit something in Steve’s chest a bit painfully. “Nothing, I guess.”

* * *

The next day, Steve had a plan. He didn’t have classes on Fridays. Probably because the school expected people to have jobs, or internships, or other productive shit. Steve, as yet, didn’t, so he set up camp in the coffee shop across the street. It was on the second floor, so he had the perfect view of people coming and going from the skyscraper’s front entrance. He could also see the side entrance, since the building stood on a corner of the block.

Steve got there as soon as the place opened, and kept a small gym towel with him to keep customers from complaining or getting him

thrown out. He was feeling better—he didn't mind the touch of fabric across his skin as much, at least—but the fact remained that a spider had bitten him, and now Steve could *walk on fucking walls*. He had to be careful with everything he touched, because so far he had torn off three kitchen cabinets, the shower faucet, towel rack, and twisted both his and Robin's apartment keys.

He waited all morning.

He waited all afternoon.

Robin came by after her morning shift at her internship for the drama costume department, and waited with him until the early evening set in.

She squeezed his shoulder. "They're closing up. We gotta go. I'll head out first and pick up dinner. Greek sound good?"

"Yeah. Sure," he sighed, defeated. He heard her footfalls all the way down the stairs as he began to pack up his laptop, charger and other schoolwork he'd been haphazardly working on...

The side entrance.

Billy stood at the side entrance.

Steve had never moved so fast in his life. He shoved his stack of schoolwork into his bag and sprinted down the stairs. He emerged on the street right as Billy stepped into the building. Steve got lucky with the crosswalk flashing the countdown until the traffic lights changed, but no matter how fast he ran, the door was shut when he got there.

"Billy! Shit..." he cried with a hit to the door. He left a vague, subtle dent from the heel of his palm...

He stared at the keypad. A keypad. Why was there a keypad out here but card scanners inside?

Steve wasn't the right person to judge architectural security, but he *was* the person to let his dumb brain oversimplify things. He tilted his body so that the nearby building's lights would reflect off the touch

pad. Of course the thing had been outside long enough to be so weathered that specific numbers weren't discernibly favored...

But something else lingered on the touch pad. Like...oil slick rainbow fingerprints. Steve blinked, and they were gone. But the longer he stared...the more he could see them again.

The back of his mind vibrated with memories of watching the *Predator* movies, as well as Dustin Henderson's voice saying something about how cold blooded things gravitate toward heat. How spiders can feel temperature with their feet. And some only see temperature.

Two of the rainbows were fading fast. Steve touched one of the numbers, and then the other. One by one, he touched the numbers in order of how fast their heat signatures were fading.

The door opened.

"YES! Nerd friends!" he exclaimed and promptly realized he was still outside.

A guy passing on the main road called back. "Hell yeah. Get on with your Trekkie self, boy!"

Steve laughed, embarrassed with a little wave as he went inside. The stairwell seemed pretty straightforward. It just went up and up and up. On every other floor, a door provided the opportunity to go elsewhere, but Steve followed the oil slick handprints. Sometimes a solid handprint lingered, hot, on the railing. Other smears were rapidly fading on the walls...on the stairs.

Is Billy okay? he wondered as he went up and up and up.

This newfound cardio vascular strength was really something, but Steve had already sweated through his shirt waiting all day. He picked up the pace, until finally he bounded up the stairs, landing per landing...

Two handprints. One on a door, and the other wrapped around the knob. Finally.

Steve emerged on a roof. He peered around, squinting through the wind tugging his hair in all directions. It wasn't the highest floor. In fact, it looked like another lab. He walked between the long lanes of soil beds raised above the gravel. Steve guessed they were raised for the water to drain, roots to stretch, and for the scientists to stand while working—

A sound, cramped and high-pitched, jerked his attention to the greenhouse. Steve knew a voice when he heard it. He blinked, seeing the hot silhouette fade through the walls as if he had gazed at the sun. Blink – Billy – Blink – Billy.

“Billy? Billy!”

The silhouette...changed. It fell to the ground, only to stand back up just as quickly as it had fallen. But it was a different shape. Too tall and...Steve didn't understand. All of the shape was warm, but it was like Billy's clothes were moving around him or something.

Steve tread lighter than any occasion he'd snuck out of his house. He peeked around the greenhouse to see Billy, but...Billy stepped onto the high edge of the building.

“BILLY!”

He dropped his bag and ran forward, ready to pull Billy back, to tackle him to the gravel—*something*. He knew Billy's home life back in Hawkins had been bad, but fuck. Not like this. He'd sounded so different the other day. He sounded happy. *Happy* to see *Steve*. Had he replayed their interaction too much in his head? Had he imagined it?

A guttural grow came out of Billy and—

He turned around, and caught Steve by the soaked front of his shirt. It was dark. Steve hadn't been able to see—wasn't sure of what he saw. But all of his senses went on high alert. Something moved around Billy's body. Like some kind of fucked up unitard with scraggly edges around Billy's face.

Billy's eyes were red and wet. Steve couldn't understand all the

details of what was happening, but he understood the red around those blue, blue eyes. The tears on his cheeks.

“Billy?” he cried, reaching for his face.

“DON’T TOUCH ME!”

Steve flew threw the air. It was all too sudden, too much for him to recover. He hit soil and wood, vegetation and gravel. A couple lanes of the garden toppled under his body, but once he stopped moving, he climbed over the wreckage. Winded but alive, he slowly crawled under the other garden beds, eyes on that large, hot figure changing shape again and again as Billy pulled on it. As if he were trying to tear the unitard off of his body.

“You want him here. Let him be here.”

“NO!”

“I don’t hear him leaving. Did we kill him?”

“Get off...you son of a bitch...” Billy sobbed. Steve’s heart ached but also recoiled at the sound of that voice. His ears and senses all pointed to Billy, but...how could Billy have two voices?

Billy lurched through wobbly steps. Where he was going, Steve didn’t know, but he was glad Billy no longer stood by the edge of the building. He pulled and pulled, to no avail, falling to his knees and using a garden bed to rise back to his feet. Steve crept behind him, feeling every piece of gravel move underneath his weight, and felt every movement of Billy’s body like a sixth sense. He heard crackles like static or bone every time Billy ripped some of the black mass from his skin.

Steve could understand two things: Billy’s anguish, and his desire to get that black sludge shit off his body.

He sprang forward, willing all that ceiling-grabbing ability into the darkness coating Billy’s body. Steve’s hands clenched into fists, and he wrenched with all his might. Billy screamed, and the millisecond that Steve hesitated, the blackness in his hands launched him into the air again.

This time, Steve was ready. He landed on his feet on the side of the greenhouse, and ran back onto the gravel to stand right side up. Half of that sludgy mass...stood on its own; half of it remained on Billy. Steve went after the more problematic side, ducking under its lunge and swerving around its movements. Considering it split apart into other pieces, Steve had to tap into some long lost gymnast classes from when he was five years old.

The rest came from whatever instinct that spider had given him. Steve let it happen, because he realized somewhere between vaulting over garden beds and ripping black stuff off of Billy's arm, that Steve was fighting for his life.

And he was losing.

No matter how much he pulled, the sludge wormed its way back over Billy's skin. The voice laughed and laughed. When it stopped laughing, it wrapped around Steve's throat like it had been toying with him the entire time. It wrenched Steve forward so his toes scraped the gravel, hanging uselessly while the darkness flowed all over Billy's body. It covered his face until another face emerged, frightening and jagged and—

"Billy? Billy?" Steve whimpered, terrified for himself and for Billy.

The face opened wide. It had so many teeth. The sludge around Steve's throat pulsed almost like it had a heartbeat, but Steve couldn't focus on that because a long, long tongue slithered over his face, behind his ears and into his hair. Steve whined, disgusted and afraid. And the thing laughed.

"This one's different, Billy. So different. So strong..."

In a last ditch effort, Steve reached toward the face. Dug his fingers into the cheek until he felt skin. He ripped the face off so he could see Billy. See those water blue eyes.

The tentacle around his throat tightened, and Billy exclaimed, "NO!" the same time Steve felt the bite on his nape pinch all over again. Tears spilled over his own cheeks and he felt that if he spoke his voice might break.

“Wait.”

The force around him slackened. Steve sucked in air only to keen as he was forced down onto his knees, so far pushed over that his nape was exposed.

“Steve?” Billy said hoarsely, like he’d been screaming for a long time. “Steve? What bit you?”

“The spiders,” he sniffled. “A spider from the lab got into my jacket. I don’t know what’s happening, Billy. I’ve been trying to find you all week.”

“Ooh, Billy. You like that.”

“Stop. You shut up.”

The creature lifted Steve up so he stayed down but could see Billy struggling with something...inside. He grit his teeth as if his whole body cramped up.

“Billy...is that thing...inside you?”

A gasping sob broke out of him. “Steve, you need to leave—”

“No. No, he won’t. He’s proven that already.”

“Stop. Please, stop.”

Steve intercepted, “Billy, what is this stuff?”

“It’s the thing in the box! The water tank! I’m so sorry, Steve. I was wrong. I was wrong.”

Billy trembled when the thing spoke. *“Wrong, indeed.”*

Steve exclaimed, “How the shit is it talking?”

“I’ve had time to learn,” it answered itself. Then paused. “Pretty boy. Ha! He calls you pretty boy. I’ll tell you, pretty Steve. My origins mean nothing. What matters is these playful humans put me, as a lone cell, inside a watermelon. I turned it into a hundred watermelons. I grew, and

then they took me inside and started...torturing me. Mind you, I'm fine. I learned, and I grew.

"I watched and I waited. When this one caught my eye, I was content to keep waiting and watching. It amused me, how humans revolved around him. They find him...attractive. Attractive people get what they want with more ease. I have many wants, Steve. Pretty Steve. I got tired of waiting.

"Then you walked in. The spiders seemed to be done waiting too. One left with you and I only waited for other nuisances to leave. Billy's task was to close the room at the end of the day. I escaped my little box as the spider escaped hers, and now I have my host."

"Host?" Steve choked. "Host—Billy, it's a parasite?"

It laughed. Tiny, thread-like black pieces reached across Billy's face, almost fondly stroking around his eyes.

"What do they call me, sweet Billy?"

He gulped and bit out, "Symbiote."

"Symmmbiote," it drawled.

"You're killing him!" Steve cried.

"Not at all. It's in the name. Symbiotic. A parasite takes. A parasite destroys. I turned one watermelon into a garden. My relationship with my host is mutual. I want what Billy wants. What makes Billy happy feeds me. And you, pretty Steve...Billy wants you."

"Stop." Billy tried to reach for the length of sludge holding Steve, but the creature covering him like a glove kept him from doing so.

"No, I won't. You've been yearning for him long before I knew you. I can feel it, Billy. I can see your memories. I feel what you feel. I'm done with pain. If you want Steve, I'll take him."

Steve was pulled above his feet again, hanging at the symbiote's mercy.

"Oh, Steve. He has wanted you for so long. My Billy has felt so much fear

in relation to you. Fear to take. Fear to be who he is. I'm so happy I found him when he was ready to stop being afraid."

Of all the things for Steve to say, the thing that came out of his mouth was: "It's really shitty of you to out someone like that."

The thing went quiet and still. The only part of it that changed was Billy blinking rapidly and gritting his teeth. Steve frowned at the goings-on. "Are you...downloading something from him? What the fuck is happening?"

"Ha! Downloading, I like that. Yes, we can transfer information to each other. I understand now. But it changes nothing. I'll take you because Billy wants you. Because you're interesting."

"Not really," Steve mumbled, thinking back on all of his classes outside of math in which he was definitely skating by.

"I've been watching the humans. It's all...so arbitrary. The inclinations you all have for one another. It doesn't make sense. Billy's mentor is engaging in sexual exploits with two people in this building. And I've learned that this is...wrong? It's amusing. I would think this all revolves around your primal instructions to reproduce, as mine instruct me to survive. To grow. To take.

"But here is where my Billy differs yet again. As far as I've learned, two beings with your allotment of organs cannot reproduce. Yet you still yearn for each other. Shall I attach to you too?"

"NO!" Billy cried.

"I can make your transformation easier. I could even remove the spider's venom from your body, if you wish."

"The only venom that's an issue right now is you," Steve spat.

It chuckled and wrapped more of itself around Steve. Thick, heavy warmth moved around his neck, his shoulders and chest, drawing him closer to Billy. With jarring clarity, Steve realized that the pulsing in the sludge...must be Billy's heartbeat. It was already a part of him. Had been for days while Steve ran around sweating, breaking things, and trying to find him.

"Billy, oh my god. I'm so sorry. I meant to find you sooner—"

"Steve..." he shook his head and dropped his eyes. "This isn't on you. I shouldn't have taken you in there."

"Everyone went in there! I might not be the only one."

"You are the only one. I saw but one spider leave. I am not wrong."

"You're a gross piece of shit," Steve snapped.

Billy gasped a pained, involuntary laugh. "I'm sorry. I didn't want it to be this way."

"How do we get this thing off of you?" Steve pleaded. "Someone will notice it's out of its cage! Who can we go to—"

"A symbiote host and a spider-bitten super human? They'll torture you as they did me."

"How do we make this thing shut up?" Steve altered.

"This will all work out nicely. A lover for Billy. And a treat for me."

"He doesn't want this!" Billy exclaimed.

"But he does. He's searched for you all week. You know this without him saying it. You've heard his conversations with the woman. You've followed him like a starved sewer rat. I won't have my Billy starve any longer."

The symbiote pulled them tighter together. Steve could clearly see the veins in Billy's eyes and the little pulls of strain on his skin where the creature clung to him.

"Steve, I'm sorry."

"For what?"

He shook his head, but he let Steve see his anguish. All of his tears. "I can't control this thing. I've been trying. It's only getting stronger. It's —Steve..."

“What?” he heard himself whine, unable to deal with Billy’s pain.
“What is it?”

Billy grimaced and grit through the words, “It’s inside me. It’s not lying. I feel...I’m getting weaker.”

“Not weak, sweet Billy. Strong.”

Steve didn’t know what was happening until Billy’s lips were shoved against his. Steve mumbled a curt, “Um,” but Billy mirrored it with something...darker. Wanton and husky that ricocheted inside Steve’s body the same time Billy’s head tilted. His lips slanted over his. Steve’s hands stopped gripping the thing around his neck to warily extend and find Billy’s torso. The sludge receded to let him touch... skin. To touch Billy.

Whatever allowed Steve to attach to walls felt Billy’s skin like... something Steve had never experienced. As if the pads of his fingers could read Billy’s skin, drink up his warmth, Steve sought more of him. He found the column of Billy’s throat, his thumb found the edge of his jaw—

Billy growled, soft and sharp at the same time. It made Steve shiver and a hard arm wrapped behind his lumbar. Billy anchored Steve against him as more of the symbiote eased out of the way for Steve to feel more of him. All of him. Did the thing *eat* Billy’s clothes?

The notion got thrown into the far rear of Steve’s mind as Billy hungrily plundered his mouth, feeling the supple give of Steve’s lips before he slid his tongue inside. Steve meant to stay focused, to stay scared and concerned. But he was lost to the taste of Billy’s tongue, Billy’s lips. Steve’s hands pushed into the hair of his nape and Billy moaned into his mouth. His other hand came up to cradle the side of Steve’s head. His thumb pressed into Steve’s cheek only enough to speak against his lips.

“Steve...it’s right. I’ve wanted you for so long.”

“*Billy*,” he whispered. Scared and overwhelmed and wanting. “What are we gonna do?”

He wasn't sure Billy heard him. Billy's eyes were on him but seemed far away before he crushed Steve's lips in another kiss. The hand on his face moved around his shoulders, locking Steve's body flush against his as Billy took and took, pouring his years of want into Steve's veins.

Steve was helpless not to swallow it up.

And somewhere, like a whisper across his neck, he heard, *"I'll make you both strong. Exactly who you're meant to be."*

Author's Note:

Venom really said, "Now kiss."

All of this just crash landed inside my brain this morning, and I had to get it out of my system. I hope you enjoyed! Can't say I won't write more of it lol but I'll leave the chapter count at 2 for now <3

I made a tumblr blog just for Harringrove things, but I post updates to both! So if you're already following my main blog for notifications, you can stay put :)

[My harringrove Tumblr~](#)

[My main Tumblr~](#)